

This is a season of miracles, and perhaps there is no greater miracle than finding a loving home for a child who needs one.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. Following the address, the President and First Lady talked with children in foster care.

**Memorandum on Adoption and Alternate Permanent Placement of Children in the Public Child Welfare System**

*December 14, 1996*

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Commerce, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management*

*Subject: Steps to Increase Adoptions and Alternate Permanent Placement for Waiting Children in the Public Child Welfare System*

During this Holiday Season, as we reflect on the importance of family in our own lives, let us remember the tens of thousands of our Nation's children in the public child welfare system who live without permanent and caring families. Foster care provides temporary shelter and relief for children who have been abused or neglected.

I am committed to giving the children waiting in our Nation's foster care system what every child in America deserves—loving parents and a healthy, stable home. The goal for every child in our Nation's public welfare system is permanency in a safe and stable home, whether it be returning home, adoption, legal guardianship, or another permanent placement. While the great majority of children in foster care will return home, for about one in five, returning home is not an option, and they will need another home, one that is caring and safe. These children wait far too long—typically over 3 years, but for many children much longer—to be placed in permanent homes. Each year, State child welfare agencies secure homes for less than one-third of the children whose goal is adoption or an alternate permanent placement. I know we can do better.

I believe we should increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system each year toward the goal of at least doubling that number by the year 2002. Returning home is not an option for about 100,000 of the over 450,000 children in the Nation's foster care system, yet only approximately 20,000 were adopted last year and approximately 7,000 were permanently placed in legal guardianships. While the number of adoptions each year has been constant for many years, I believe that by working with States to identify and break down barriers to permanent placements, setting annual numerical targets, rewarding successful performance, and raising public awareness, we can meet the target of at least 54,000 children adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system by the year 2002.

Today, therefore, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to report to me within 60 days on actions to be taken to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and at least to double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed out of the public foster care system.

I. To increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, this report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:

- (a) Plans to work with States on setting and reaching State specific numerical targets, using the technical assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services National Resource Centers to make information on best practices available to States and to engage community leaders, parents, and the business and faith communities;
- (b) Proposals to provide per child financial incentives to States for increases in the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. Options considered should have little to no net costs, as increases in the number of adoptions from the public system will reduce foster care costs, thereby off-

- setting much if not all of the incentive payments;
- (c) A proposal to ensure continued aggressive implementation of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act, as amended by the Inter-ethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act;
  - (d) Plans to compile and publish an annual State-by-State report on success in meeting the numerical targets; and
  - (e) Plans to recognize successful States.
- II. To move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, the report shall also recommend changes to Federal law and regulations and other actions needed to emphasize the importance of planning for permanency as soon as a child enters the foster care system. The Secretary's report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:
- (a) Plans to provide States with funding to identify barriers to permanency and to develop targeted strategies to find permanent homes for children who have been in foster care a particularly long time;
  - (b) Proposals to shorten the period of time between a child's placement in foster care and his or her initial hearing at which a permanency determination is made;
  - (c) A proposal to clarify that the purpose of "dispositional hearings" is to plan for permanency and, as appropriate, to consider referrals for family mediation, termination of parental rights, adoption, legal guardianship, or other permanent placements;
  - (d) A proposal to clarify the "reasonable efforts" requirement and other Federal policy as it relates to permanency and safety;
  - (e) Plans to ensure that States give appropriate weight to permanency planning by establishing standards for securing permanency through adoption or guardianship, once a decision has been made that a child cannot be returned home; and
  - (f) Plans to examine alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship, when adoption is not possible.
- Last month, I signed a proclamation designating November as National Adoption Month—a time to increase awareness about the tens of thousands of children waiting for families and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption. However, adoption must be a national concern throughout the year. Therefore, I direct:
- (a) The Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and lead a public awareness effort including use of public service announcements, print materials, and the Internet;
  - (b) The Secretaries of Health and Human Services and the Treasury in consultation with State, civic, and private sector leaders to develop and disseminate information about the new adoption tax credits and other adoption benefits;
  - (c) The Secretaries of Labor and Commerce, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to identify and recognize companies in the private sector with model policies to encourage and ease adoption among employees; and
  - (d) The Director of the Office of Personnel Management to direct all Federal agencies to provide information and support to Federal employees who are prospective adoptive parents.

**William J. Clinton**

**The President's News Conference  
With European Union Leaders**  
*December 16, 1996*

**President Clinton.** Thank you very much. Please be seated. It is a pleasure to welcome back to the White House Prime Minister Bruton of Ireland and President Santer of the European Commission.

A year ago in Madrid, the United States and the European Union launched the New Transatlantic Agenda to fight international crime and terrorism and drug trafficking, to support peacemakers around the world, to